



April 6, 2016

## DHS Rolls Out Customer Service Model

By Michael Wilson



### A Message From the Director

#### Customer Service

DHS has a long and proud history of providing high quality medical services. We have achieved this through hiring mission-focused physicians, nurses, pharmacists and other health professionals. Often innovations such as the optimal care of neonates or robotics for spinal cord injuries were first developed at DHS facilities.

Where we have been weaker is in customer service, especially providing timely appointments, answering the telephone quickly, adequate parking, good signage, and seeing patients promptly once they arrive at our facility. And when things have gone amuck as happens in a system—for example, when due to no one's fault the patient has had to wait, or come back because we couldn't meet their needs on that day—we have not been as good as we need to be on saying "I'm sorry" and trying to make the person feel better.

That is why I am so pleased that we are implementing a training on building empathy and rapport with our patients for both line staff and supervisors and managers. I know what is in the heart of DHS employees—the desire to do good. With this training and with improvements in our infrastructure (e.g., new phone systems so that we can answer all calls in a timely way), I believe we can make the quality of our customer experience as high as the quality of our medical services.

Best wishes.



Mitch Katz, MD

A patient may not remember a lab result or a medication regimen, but chances are will remember if the security officer smiled, the registration clerk said thank you, or the provider asked about the kids. In today's complex healthcare setting, it's the simple gestures that can have a big impact on patient experience.

And for health systems to stay competitive, customer service is seen as a driver of patient retention and quality improvement.

DHS and its labor partner SEIU 721 are deploying a home-grown customer service model as part of a Labor-Management Transformation Council (LMTC) subcommittee focused in improving the patient experience. The goal is to create a culture of customer service transformation that extends from the front desk encounter through every touch point of the visit. The training is required for all DHS staff. Members of the LMTC including DHS director Mitchell Katz, MD, SEIU 721 president Bob Schoonover and the hospital chief executives have all taken the training to underscore executive commitment to the effort. "What we found was that employees care about the

patients they interact with, but it isn't always conveyed or conveyed consistently," says DHS Ambulatory Care Network operations chief Quentin O'Brien. "The goal is to provide employees with the tools they need to build customer service skills into every patient interaction that is reinforced through coaching."

A customized curriculum created by the Workforce Education and Resource Center (WERC) focuses on building empathy, or rapport with patients. A separate coaching module was developed for supervisors and managers that includes rounds and observations. Customer service 'champions' will encourage implementation at the facility level. Rather than an isolated training exercise, the effort aims for continual learning. WERC director Diane Factor says it's important to understand the pressures employees face working in a large health system serving multicultural patients. "DHS employees are on the front lines everyday with hundreds of patients who are lost, confused, sometimes angry, and feeling lousy. It takes a lot to maintain that really high excellent service."

(See 'MODEL' on back)

## Health Agency Town Hall Draws Hundreds

By Michael Wilson



Employees from the Departments of Health Services (DHS), Mental Health (DMH) and Public Health (DPH) turned out for the L.A. County Health Agency's first public meeting held on March 2 downtown. A virtual format allowed for participation from over 180 sites.

Leaders from the Health Agency and several unions discussed efforts underway including transitioning incarcerated individuals incompetent to stand trial into community care settings, reducing recidivism through supportive housing, tackling substance abuse in the jails and juvenile halls, and ensuring that front line workers have a voice in decisions.

Themes of coordination, equity and whole-person care were

(See 'TOWN HALL' on back)



(‘MODEL’)

The curriculum breaks customer service down into what Factor calls the anatomy of an interaction, which involves being attentive to body language and cultural markers. Making a connection with every patient, listening, and giving affirmation are tactics used to make the patient feel at the center of care. WERC leadership coach Lisa Hamilton says a lightbulb moment in the trainings is when participants are challenged to distinguish between sympathy for patients, which is feeling sorry for them and is disempowering, and empathy, which establishes a human connection. Self-care is also an essential component of the sessions. “The daily stresses of delivering care can lead to mental and physical exhaustion. It’s important for healthcare professionals to take care of themselves, their health is tantamount to the patient’s health.” SEIU 721 vice president Patricia Castillo says good customer service engenders loyalty — an important factor during annual enrollment periods when patients may be courted



by competing plans and providers. “Providing good customer service is about encouraging patient loyalty by communicating clearly and effectively with them as well as among ourselves. Working closely as a team, creating human connection through empathy, and creating lasting relationships between our staff and our patients is the best approach.” A byproduct of good customer service is a more productive and less stressful work setting, administrators say, because positivity spreads. Good customer service also affects the bottom line. Scores from the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) survey that asks patients about such things as communication with doctors and responsiveness of hospital staff, now have financial consequences. Government payers like Medicare base reimbursements in part on those survey results and reported quality data. “This is really about building empathy and putting yourself in the patient’s shoes,” adds Factor. “Empathy makes a difference.”

(‘TOWN HALL’)



echoed during the session, combined with urgency to find innovative solutions to unmet needs. Teddy McKenna, head of the AFSCME union, said integration was long overdue, recalling times in her county career where she felt constrained by siloes and bureaucracy that ultimately failed clients. “As social workers we see our clients as whole people embedded in communities who need resources.” SEIU 721 president Bob Schoonover said his 90,000 members are invested in the Agency’s mission and at the forefront of transformation, noting that patient-focused care relies on healthcare workers who are supported. “Whole person care requires that all commit to fostering a just culture where members are treated with dignity, respect and safe working conditions.” Opportunities for co-location of primary care services in mental health and public health facilities and use of a unified record system were cited as examples of common-sense approaches to providing comprehensive services to patients in settings where they are comfortable. L.A. County interim health officer Jeffrey Gunzenhauser, MD, said he envisioned DHS providers using the e-Consult platform to link TB patients to Public Health specialists, or having DPH substance abuse counselors working side by side providers

in a DMH clinic as part of stronger service integration. Agency leaders also nodded to the future, saying County health facilities had historically been placed in areas where the County owned or leased buildings. Future facilities would be built using integrated care delivery models in areas based on community need. Health Agency director Mitchell Katz, MD, applauded the labor partnerships, saying public healthcare systems in California and the country have diminished over time and that integration was a way to preserve the L.A. County system with labor and management working together. “Our greatest joint goal is to prove that the public system is a great system and should survive, thrive and grow.” In response to participant questions, panelists said uniform job classifications were being considered to allow for easier transfer or promotion within the three departments. While there are no plans to consolidate units like contracts, supply chain or human resources, Information Technology was an area where consolidation made sense given wider adoption of the DHS ORCHID electronic medical record platform. To view the town hall session, [click here](#).

# ORCHID Go-Live at Rancho Los Amigos a Huge Success!

By LaVasha Floyd



For more than 125 years, clinicians at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center have been restoring health, rebuilding life, and revitalizing hope for persons with life-changing illnesses, injuries, or disabilities.

“It is easy to find information in ORCHID; I can search for patients more efficiently, which helps me provide better customer service.”  
— Sandra Weldon

On March 15, Rancho Los Amigos and DHS made history as we celebrated the monumental milestone of DHS-wide adoption of the ORCHID electronic health record (EHR)

system. For the first time in history, all DHS hospitals and clinics are using one system. This accomplishment comes just 16 months after the first Go-Live. Now all 25 DHS locations, Rancho Los Amigos included, have transitioned over to use of the ORCHID EHR.

The campus was buzzing as we welcomed ORCHID. There was action everywhere you turned. Mission Control was a lively place, as our Subject Matter Experts worked tirelessly to address any issues that were presented. There was a tremendous outpouring of support from Super Users, in their coveted purple vests, who were ready and willing to lend a hand on the front lines. With each passing day, staff became more comfortable and more confident using ORCHID. Go-Live at Rancho Los Amigos was a huge success!

“Go-Live was all about teamwork, everyone came together to support one another and shared their knowledge to ensure our success.”  
— Tiffany Yonemoto